



# **Rep. Joyce McDonald**

## **Report to Seniors**

### **25th District**



Spring 2003

Dear friends,

As the Legislature enters a special session May 12, I would like to provide this progress report to you. We have some important decisions remaining as we try to bridge a \$2.6 billion budget gap. My commitment is to provide a balanced budget without raising taxes. My priority as your state representative is to make sure we adopt a responsible, sustainable budget that protects important programs for seniors, the disabled, and the most vulnerable. This report provides an update on several of these issues important to our senior community.

I want you to know that all of your calls, letters and e-mails to my office are very much appreciated. I encourage you to continue communicating with me. Please know that senior citizen issues remain at the top of my legislative agenda. My door is always open, so please let me know how I may help.

Sincerely,

Rep. Joyce McDonald

**Contact me  
if you need  
help**



I am here to serve as well as to represent you. Whether it is concerns about property taxes, problems with state health care coverage or long-term care, or other matters related to state government, I can help. Whatever your question or concern, don't ever hesitate to contact my office.

My legislative assistant is Michele Smith. She can help to answer your questions about the legislative session, help you work with state agencies, or even schedule a time for us to meet.

Here is my contact information:

**Rep. Joyce McDonald**  
**P.O. Box 40600**  
**Olympia, WA 98504-0600**

**Phone: (360) 786-7948**  
**E-mail: [mcdonald\\_jo@leg.wa.gov](mailto:mcdonald_jo@leg.wa.gov)**  
**On the web:**  
**<http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/mcdonald.htm>**

# Rep. Joyce McDonald • Report to Seniors

## Remaining vigilant for seniors in the state budget



As your legislator, I consider myself a “fiscal conservative” when it comes to the budget. In other words, I believe government should be efficient and accountable with your money. I also believe government must make tough choices and set priorities. One of those priorities must be helping senior citizens.

At a time when the state budget has such a large deficit, senior programs have become easy targets. For example, nearly 28 nursing homes in Washington have closed since 1998 – seven of them in just the past year. Many of those closures are largely due to federal Medicare reductions and from state underfunding of Medicaid. It becomes increasingly important as the Legislature faces these budget challenges that we protect existing services to seniors and to our state’s most vulnerable.

Although the governor was on the right track this year in setting priorities in his budget proposal, I believe he went way too far in cuts against senior programs, including a \$237 million reduction in Medicaid, \$36 million from nursing homes, and slashing funding for developmental disabilities by \$16 million.

The Senate Republican proposal now under consideration is much kinder to senior services. It would provide a \$42 million increase for long-term care, allowing for 3,000 additional people to receive publicly-funded care in nursing homes, community residential facilities and in their own homes. It also would increase Medicaid payment rates to nursing homes by 3 percent. Plus, it would fund a \$9.3 million increase in Medicaid personal care services for nearly 12,000 adults and children with developmental disabilities.

As the final debate of the budget nears, I will continue to fight on your behalf to protect these important programs for senior citizens.

## Providing meaningful prescription drug assistance

In a nation as prosperous as ours, senior citizens should be able to get the prescription drugs they need at their local pharmacy at prices they can afford. Unfortunately, the cost of prescription drugs has been increasing by 18 percent each year for several years. Many of our seniors no longer can afford their medicines.

One of my top priorities of the 2003 legislative session was to pass a prescription drug bill that would help seniors who are uninsured or otherwise unable to afford their prescriptions.

We passed legislation from the House to make prescriptions more affordable. Senate Bill 5904 was amended by the House to allow the state to get volume discounts through bulk buying so that consumers save.

When the regular session ended April 27, the bill was still under negotiation. I am hopeful we can take a meaningful step forward on this issue during the upcoming special session.

## Prescription drug discounts available

Several drug companies have announced voluntary discount programs for Medicare-eligible patients with low to moderate incomes. Eligible subscribers to these programs can receive brand-name prescriptions at a 20 to 40 percent discount or with affordable co-pays of just \$12 to \$15.

Toll-free phone numbers are provided below, so you can find out if you qualify or want to learn more about these programs.

- **GlaxoSmithKline Orange Card**  
1-888-ORANGE6
- **Novartis Care Card**  
1-866-974-CARE
- **Pfizer Share Card**  
1-800-717-6005
- **Lilly Answers Card**  
1-877-RX-Lilly
- **Together Rx**  
1-800-865-7211

## Senior property tax relief - An idea whose time has come



It's important that we do everything possible to make sure people who have paid property taxes all of their lives and now are on fixed incomes are not taxed out of their own homes. That's why I sponsored legislation this year to increase the income threshold limits on the state's existing senior citizen property tax relief program up to \$34,000. My proposal, House Bill 1029, would also have allowed deductions for health-care coverage, including dental, vision, co-payments for Medicare and long-term care, to allow more seniors to qualify for property tax relief.

Unfortunately, of the eight senior citizen property tax relief bills introduced this year, the Democrat House Finance Committee chairman was unwilling to allow any to move forward. Some may say it's unrealistic to provide tax relief at a time when the state budget is in a crunch. I believe it's unrealistic to force low-income seniors to wait another year. I will continue to work on this issue until you get the tax breaks you deserve.

## Are you getting the tax breaks you deserve?



Although we were not able to increase property tax relief this year for seniors, you may still be able to take advantage of the state's existing senior tax relief program. You may qualify for property tax exemptions if you meet all of the following criteria:

- You are at least 61 years of age or disabled
- You own and live in a single-family home, mobile home, or condominium.
- You have a combined household income not exceeding \$30,000.

Expenses for some nursing or home health care and some prescription drugs may be deducted when calculating your income. You also can remain eligible for tax breaks if your home is rented while you're in the hospital or nursing home.

## Valuation limit freeze for qualified seniors



Qualifying citizens are entitled to property tax exemptions on their principal residence and up to one acre of land. The value of the residence is frozen at its value on Jan. 1 of the year in which you first qualify for the program.

### Exemption schedule

You are eligible for the following exemptions if your combined household income falls within the range indicated:

#### Income

\$24,001 to \$30,000

\$18,001 to \$24,000

\$18,000 or less

#### Exemption

All excess levies (special school levies are an example of excess levies).

All excess levies and regular levies on the greater of \$40,000 or 35% of assessed valuation (\$60,000 max.).

All excess levies and regular levies on the greater of \$50,000 or 60% of assessed valuation.

**Call the Pierce  
County Assessor to  
see if you qualify:  
253-798-6111  
or Toll-free:  
1-800-992-2456**

## PROPERTY TAX DEFERRALS

If you are 60 years of age or retired because of physical disability, and your disposable income is \$34,000 or less, you may qualify for property tax deferrals. The state allows property tax deferrals on up to 80 percent of the equity in your home. The deferral program applies to your principal residence and up to five acres, if zoning requires a larger parcel size.

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## Honoring our troops and our veterans



Since the war began in Iraq, I have displayed an American flag in my office window in Olympia. Many young people from our local area, including my son-in-law, are overseas fighting for the Iraqi people's freedom and against terrorists who threaten ours. It's important that we come together as a nation to support our troops who are putting their lives on the line for each of us.

I was also proud to be a supporter of legislation to honor our war veterans. **Senate Bill 5049** designates November as Veterans' History Awareness Month. It encourages educational institutions, public entities and private organizations to designate time for activities in commemoration of America's veterans. I co-sponsored the House version of the measure, House Bill 1124. The Senate bill passed the Legislature and is expected to be signed into law by the governor.



## Let's make it a **SENIOR SATURDAY** with Rep. Joyce McDonald

I want to hear from you. That's why I'm inviting you to join me for an informal visit with coffee and refreshments. Let's talk about the issues you really care about. Join me as we make it a "Senior Saturday."

**Date:** May 17th

**Time:** 10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

**Location:** Puyallup Public Library - North and South Meeting Room  
524 S Meridian; Puyallup

## INSIDE:

- Protecting seniors in the state budget
- Providing prescription drug assistance
- Getting the property tax relief you deserve

# Report to Seniors

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